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**April 2010****MILITARY TRAINING**

**Actions Needed to  
Further Improve the  
Consistency of  
Combat Skills  
Training Provided to  
Army and Marine  
Corps Support Forces**



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# Highlights

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## Why GAO Did This Study

In conventional warfare, support forces such as military police, engineers, and medical personnel normally operate behind the front lines of a battlefield. But in Iraq and Afghanistan—both in U.S. Central Command's (CENTCOM) area of responsibility—there is no clear distinction between front lines and rear areas, and support forces are sometimes exposed to hostile fire without help from combat arms units. The House report to the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2010 directed GAO to report on combat skills training for support forces. GAO assessed the extent to which (1) Army and Marine Corps support forces are completing required combat skills training; (2) the services and CENTCOM have information to validate completion of required training; and (3) the services have used lessons learned to adjust combat skills training for support forces. To do so, GAO analyzed current training requirements, documentation of training completion, and lessons learned guidance; observed support force training; and interviewed headquarters officials, trainers, and trainees between August 2009 and February 2010.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making recommendations to clarify CENTCOM's training requirements, increase visibility over the completion or waiving of required training, and improve consistency in the application of lessons learned. DOD agreed or partially agreed with all of the seven recommendations.

[View GAO-10-465 or key components.](#)  
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April 2010

## MILITARY TRAINING

### Actions Needed to Further Improve the Consistency of Combat Skills Training Provided to Army and Marine Corps Support Forces

## What GAO Found

Army and Marine Corps support forces undergo significant combat skills training, but additional actions could help clarify CENTCOM's training requirements, ensure the services fully incorporate those requirements into their training requirements, and improve the consistency of training that is being conducted. CENTCOM has issued a list of training tasks to be completed, in addition to the services' training requirements, before deploying to its area of operations. However, there is confusion over which forces the CENTCOM requirements apply to, the conditions under which the tasks are to be trained, and the standards for successfully completing the training. As a result, interpretations of the requirements vary and some trainees receive detailed, hands-on training for a particular task while others simply observe a demonstration of the task. In addition, while the Army and Marine Corps are training their forces on most of CENTCOM's required tasks, servicemembers are not being trained on some required tasks prior to deploying.

While units collect information on the completion of training tasks, additional actions would help higher level decision-makers assess the readiness of deploying units and servicemembers. Currently, both CENTCOM and the services lack complete information on the extent to which Army and Marine Corps support forces are completing required combat skills training. The Army has recently designated the Digital Training Management System as its system of record for tracking the completion of required training, but guidance concerning system implementation is unclear and the system lacks some needed capabilities. As a result, support forces are not fully utilizing the system, and are inconsistently tracking completion of individual and unit training using paper records, stand-alone spreadsheets, and other automated systems. The Marine Corps also uses inconsistent approaches to document training completion. Furthermore, as GAO reported in May 2008, CENTCOM does not have a clearly defined waiver process to provide visibility over the extent to which personnel are deploying to its area of operations without having completed its required training tasks. As a result, CENTCOM and the services have limited visibility over the extent to which servicemembers have or have not completed all required training.

While trainers at Army and Marine Corps training sites have applied lessons learned information and made significant changes to the combat skills training they provide support forces, the changes to training have varied across sites. Army and Marine Corps doctrine requires the collection of after action reports, the primary formal vehicle for collecting lessons learned. Lessons are also shared informally, such as through communication between deployed forces and units training to replace them. While the services have these formal and informal means to facilitate the sharing of lessons learned information, trainers at the various training sites are not consistently sharing information about the changes they have made to their training programs. As a result, servicemembers are trained inconsistently and units that are deploying for similar missions sometimes receive different types and amounts of training.

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## Abbreviations

CALL	Center for Army Lessons Learned
CENTCOM	United States Central Command
DOD	Department of Defense
DTMS	Digital Training Management System
HMMWV	high-mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicle
MCCLL	Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned
MRAP	mine resistant ambush protected vehicle

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April 16, 2010

**Congressional Committees**

Since 2001, the Army and Marine Corps have deployed a large number of support forces to U.S. Central Command's (CENTCOM) area of responsibility to support operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup> Support forces reside in both the active and reserve components and include the following:

- Army support forces consist of: combat support units that provide fire support and operational assistance to combat elements and include military police, combat engineers, and military intelligence soldiers, and combat service support units that provide essential capabilities, functions, activities, and tasks necessary to sustain operating forces including soldiers who provide transportation, medical, and quartermaster support.<sup>2</sup>
- Marine Corps support forces, known as Logistics Combat Elements, represent one of the four elements of a deploying Marine Corps Air Ground Task Force and perform tasks such as medical, supply, engineer, and transportation.<sup>3</sup>

In conventional warfare conditions, support forces would normally operate in rear areas away from the front lines of a battlefield. However, the current combat environments in Iraq and Afghanistan have demonstrated that there are no clear distinctions between the front lines and rear support areas, and support forces are, therefore, at times exposed to hostile fire without support from combat arms units.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Combat support and combat service support forces are often referred to as noncombat arms forces. For the purposes of this report, we will refer to these forces as support forces.

<sup>2</sup>The function of the Quartermaster Corps is to provide support to the Army in the following areas: general supply—except for ammunition and medical supplies; mortuary affairs; subsistence; petroleum and water; aerial delivery; shower, laundry, fabric/light textile repair; and materiel and distribution management.

<sup>3</sup>The other three elements of the Marine Corps Air Ground Task Force are the command element, the ground combat element, and the aviation combat element.

<sup>4</sup>Combat arms forces provide direct combat power to meet operational requirements, performing their core missions within service deployment constructs, such as Army brigades or Marine Corps regiments.

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The House Armed Services Committee report to the Fiscal Year 2010 National Defense Authorization Act directed GAO to report on a number of military readiness issues, including the adequacy of combat skills training provided to support forces.<sup>5</sup> We have previously reported on combat skills training for Air Force and Navy forces,<sup>6</sup> and will report separately on other issues called for in the House report. This report specifically assesses the extent to which (1) Army and Marine Corps support forces are completing required combat skills training; (2) the services and Central Command have information to validate the completion of required combat skills training; and (3) the Army and Marine Corps have applied lessons learned from operational experiences to adjust combat skills training for support forces.

To assess the extent to which the Army and Marine Corps support forces are completing required combat skills training, between August 2009 and February 2010, we reviewed U.S. Central Command, Army, and Marine Corps training requirements and guidance, and we interviewed combatant command and service officials to discuss these documents. We also observed support force training, interviewed Army and Marine Corps trainers, and active and reserve component units participating in predeployment training, and analyzed information from training sites. Specifically, we conducted discussions with trainers and members of four Army active component, five Army Reserve, and one Army National Guard support units and three active component Marine Corps combat logistics battalions. These units were either conducting training or stationed at some of the services' largest training facilities—Fort Hood, Fort Dix, Camp Lejeune, Camp Pendleton, and Twentynine Palms. To assess the extent to which the services and Central Command have information to validate the completion of required combat skills training, we reviewed joint and service guidance to determine the requirements for documenting the completion or waiving of training requirements. We also interviewed combatant command and service headquarters and training command officials as well as members of the previously listed Army and Marine Corps units and reviewed service documentation concerning the extent to which servicemembers were completing required training. To assess the

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<sup>5</sup>H.R. Rep. No. 111-166, at 293-94 (2009).

<sup>6</sup>GAO, *Military Training: Navy and Air Force Need to More Fully Apply Best Practices to Enhance Development and Management of Combat Skills Training*, GAO-09-220R (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 28, 2009).

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extent to which the Army and Marine Corps have applied lessons learned information to adjust combat skills training for support forces, we evaluated service policies on the collection and dissemination of this information. At the sites we visited, we also interviewed training command officials, trainers, unit officials in charge of developing training plans, and liaisons from the service lessons learned centers. Additionally, we discussed the collection and dissemination of lessons learned information with officials from the service lessons learned centers and we reviewed a nongeneralizable sample of formal lessons learned reports they had published.

We conducted this performance audit from August 2009 through February 2010, in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. Additional details on our scope and methodology are in appendix I.

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## Background

The services and combatant commands both have responsibilities for ensuring servicemembers are trained to carry out their assigned missions. As a result, both the services and combatant commands have developed specific training requirements.

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### CENTCOM and Service Responsibilities

Combatant commanders and service secretaries both have responsibilities related to ensuring the preparedness of forces that are assigned to the combatant commands. Under Title 10 of the U.S. Code, the commander of a combatant command is directly responsible for the preparedness of the command to carry out its assigned missions. In addition, according to Title 10 of the U.S. Code, each service secretary is responsible for training their forces to fulfill the current and future operational requirements of the combatant commands.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the Office of the Secretary of Defense has issued guidance for managing and developing training for servicemembers. Specifically, DOD issued a directive, which stated the

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<sup>7</sup>See 10 U.S.C. §164 (2010) for responsibilities of commanders of combatant commands and sections 3013, 5013, and 8013 of Title 10, U.S. Code (2010) for the responsibilities of the service secretaries.

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services are responsible for developing service training, doctrine, procedures, tactics, and techniques, and another that required that training resemble the conditions of actual operations and be responsive to the needs of the combatant commanders.<sup>8</sup>

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## Unit Commanders' Responsibilities

According to Joint Publication 1, unit commanders are responsible for the training and readiness of their units.<sup>9</sup> Army and Marine Corps guidance also assigns unit commanders responsibility for certifying that their units have completed all required training and are prepared to deploy. Specifically, Army Regulation 350-1 states that unit commanders are responsible for the training proficiency of their unit and, when required, for certifying that training has been conducted to standard and within prescribed time periods.<sup>10</sup> In addition, a Department of the Army Executive Order states that, for the reserve component, unit commanders, in concert with service component commands, certify completion of training and the service component command—the Army National Guard or U.S. Army Reserve—validates units for deployment.<sup>11</sup> Marine Administrative Message 740/07 states that coordination of predeployment training is the responsibility of the unit commander and all questions concerning the training should be vetted through the commander or his operations element.<sup>12</sup> Further, unit commanders validate that their units are certified for deployment, doing so through a certification message that documents the extent to which deploying Marines have successfully completed predeployment training.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>DOD Directive 5100.1, Functions of the Department of Defense and Its Major Components (Aug. 1, 2002) and DOD Directive 1322.18, Military Training (Jan. 13, 2009).

<sup>9</sup>Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub. 1, Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States (May 14, 2007), incorporating Change 1, March 20, 2009.

<sup>10</sup>Army Regulation 350-1, Army Training and Leader Development (Dec. 18, 2009).

<sup>11</sup>Headquarters, Department of the Army Executive Order 150-08, Reserve Component Deployment Expeditionary Force Pre- and Post-Mobilization Training Strategy (March 2008).

<sup>12</sup>Marine Administrative Message 740/07, The Pre-Deployment Toolkit (Dec. 19, 2007).

<sup>13</sup>Marine Corps Order 3502.6, Marine Corps Force Generation Process (Jan. 26, 2010).

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## CENTCOM Training Requirements

Combatant commanders have wide-reaching authority over assigned forces. In this capacity, CENTCOM has established baseline theater entry requirements that include training tasks that all individuals must complete before deploying to the CENTCOM area of operations.<sup>14</sup> Specifically, these CENTCOM training requirements include minimum training tasks for both units and individuals. Required individual tasks include, but are not limited to, basic marksmanship and weapons qualification, high-mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicle (HMMWV) and mine resistant ambush protected (MRAP) vehicle egress assistance training, non-lethal weapons usage, first aid, counter-improvised explosive device training, and a number of briefings including rules of engagement.

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## Service Training Requirements

The services have established combat training requirements that their servicemembers must complete at various points throughout their careers. During initial entry training, recruits are trained on service tasks and skills, including basic military tactics, weapons training, and marksmanship. In addition, the services have annual training requirements that are focused on tasks such as crew-served weapons training, reacting to chemical and biological attacks, and offensive and defensive tactics. Prior to deploying overseas, servicemembers must also complete a set of service directed predeployment training requirements. These predeployment requirements incorporate the combatant commander's requirements for the area where the forces will be deployed. U.S. Army Forces Command and the Commandant of the Marine Corps have both issued training requirements for forces deploying to the CENTCOM area of operations or in support of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>15</sup> These documents also require that units complete a final collective event prior to deployment to demonstrate proficiency in collective tasks.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>U.S. Central Command FY10 Joint Sourced Training Requirement (May 7, 2009). As outlined in CENTCOM guidance, all individuals deploying to its area of responsibility are required to complete the outlined theater entry requirements before deploying to the CENTCOM area of operation.

<sup>15</sup>U.S. Army Forces Command Pre-deployment Training Guidance for Follow-on Forces Deploying In Support Of Southwest Asia (Oct. 27, 2009) and Marine Corps Order 3502.6 (Jan. 26, 2010).

<sup>16</sup>The Army commonly refers to this event as the culminating training event, while the Marine Corps commonly refers to this as the mission rehearsal exercise.

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## Collection and Dissemination of Lessons Learned

Lessons learned are defined as results from an evaluation or observation of an implemented corrective action that produced an improved performance or increased capability.<sup>17</sup> The primary vehicle for formally collecting and disseminating lessons learned information is the after action report. Army and Marine Corps guidance require that units submit after action reports to the services' respective lessons learned centers.<sup>18</sup> Army Regulation 11-33 established its Army Lessons Learned Program to create an information sharing culture and a system for collecting, analyzing, disseminating, integrating, and archiving new concepts, tactics, techniques, and procedures. The regulation further assigned the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) primary responsibility for the Army Lessons Learned Program. The Marine Corps established its Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned (MCCLL) to provide a relevant, responsive source of institutional knowledge that facilitates rapid adaptation of lessons into the operating forces and supporting establishments.

The Army and Marine Corps have both formal and informal approaches to collect and disseminate lessons learned information. Their formal approaches often rely on a wide network of MCCLL and CALL liaison officers at training centers and in Iraq and Afghanistan, but the centers also publish relevant information on their Web sites to make it widely available. The informal networks based on personal relationships between unit commanders, trainers, or individual soldiers and marines have also facilitated the sharing of lessons learned information.

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<sup>17</sup>Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction 3150.25D, Joint Lessons Learned Program (Oct. 10, 2008). According to Army guidance, lessons learned are defined as validated knowledge and experience derived from observations and the historical study of military training, exercises and combat operations that leads to a change in behavior at either the tactical (standard operating procedures, tactics, techniques, and procedures, and so forth), operational, or strategic level or in one or more of the Army's doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, and facilities (DOTMLPF) domains. Army Regulation 11-33, Army Lessons Learned Program (ALLP) (Oct. 17, 2006).

<sup>18</sup>Army Regulation 11-33 (Oct. 17, 2006) and Marine Corps Order 3504.1, Marine Corps Lessons Learned Program (MCLLP) and the Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned (MCCLL) (July 31, 2006). After action reports highlight best practices or areas for improvement, and service officials explained that these reports capture feedback at various points, to include during pre-deployment training, while deployed in-theater, and post-deployment.

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## Prior GAO Work

GAO has previously reported on combat skills training provided to nonstandard forces.<sup>19</sup> In May 2008, we reported that the Air Force and Navy waived CENTCOM established training requirements without consistently coordinating with the command, so CENTCOM lacked full visibility over the extent to which all of its forces were meeting training requirements.<sup>20</sup> We recommended that the Secretary of Defense direct the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness, in conjunction with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, develop and issue a policy to guide the training and use of nonstandard forces, to include training waiver responsibilities and procedures. DOD agreed with our recommendation, stating that it had work underway to ensure that the necessary guidance was in place for effective training of nonstandard forces. However, as of February 2010, it had not issued such guidance.

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## Army and Marine Corps Support Forces Receive Significant Combat Skills Training, but May Not Consistently Complete All Required Tasks

### Army and Marine Corps Support Forces Receive Significant Combat Skills Training

Although Army and Marine Corps support forces undergo significant training, they may not consistently or successfully complete all required training tasks prior to deploying. Both CENTCOM and the services have issued predeployment training requirements. However, some of CENTCOM's training requirements lack associated conditions and standards, and confusion exists over which forces the requirements apply to. In addition, the Army and Marine Corps have not included certain CENTCOM required tasks in their predeployment training requirements, and unit commanders can certify their units for deployment even if all the required individual and collective training tasks have not been successfully completed.

The services provide combat skills training to their servicemembers, including support forces, at various points throughout their careers. During initial entry training, recruits are trained on service tasks and skills, including basic military tactics, weapons training, and marksmanship. In addition, servicemembers participate in annual training that is focused on tasks such as crew-served weapons training, reacting to chemical and biological attacks, and offensive and defensive tactics. Soldiers and

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<sup>19</sup>Nonstandard forces are defined as joint sourced, in-lieu of, and ad hoc forces as well as individual augmentees.

<sup>20</sup>GAO, *Military Readiness: Joint Policy Needed to Better Manage the Training and Use of Certain Forces to Meet Operational Demands*, GAO-08-670 (Washington, D.C.: May 30, 2008).

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marines also participate in combat skills training prior to deploying for any overseas operations. As a result, the predeployment combat skills training that support unit personnel receive should be viewed as a significant piece of their training to operate in an asymmetric environment, but not as their only training to operate in that environment.

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### Some of CENTCOM's Training Requirements Do Not Clearly Define Conditions and Standards, and Confusion Exists over to Whom the Requirements Apply

CENTCOM has issued a list of training tasks that all individuals assigned to its area of responsibility, including support unit personnel, must complete before deploying in support of ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. While the CENTCOM training requirements outline tasks that must be trained, the command does not always clearly define the conditions and standards to which all of the tasks should be trained. Task conditions identify all equipment, tools, materials, references, job aids, and supporting personnel required to perform the task, while standards indicate the basis for judging effectiveness of task performance. For some training tasks, CENTCOM includes specific guidance. For example, weapons qualification requirements include a detailed discussion of when the qualification must take place, equipment that must be worn, and range distances.

For some training tasks, however, CENTCOM does not provide any conditions or standards. For example, as noted above, CENTCOM requires that all deploying forces complete HMMWV rollover training, but it does not specify how the training should be conducted. Consequently, service training has varied within and among the Army and Marine Corps. At one Marine Corps site, training officials explained that HMMWV rollover training could be completed in less than a half hour. On the other hand, trainers at one Army training site noted that their HMMWV rollover training consisted of a full day of training that included a classroom overview and hands-on practice in a simulator with both day and night scenarios, pyrotechnics to simulate improvised explosive devices, and the incorporation of casualty evacuation procedures.

For other training tasks, the CENTCOM requirements contain only general guidance on training conditions. For example, for some tasks such as first aid and improvised explosive device training, CENTCOM requires that classroom training be followed up with practical application during field training that mimics the harsh, chaotic, and stressful conditions servicemembers encounter in the CENTCOM area of operations. However, the requirements do not identify the materials or training aides to be used in conducting the training and they do not indicate the standard for successfully completing the training. While service officials acknowledged

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that, as outlined in Title 10 of the U.S. Code,<sup>21</sup> it is their responsibility to train servicemembers, they stated that CENTCOM's list of minimum theater entry training tasks was unclear, which resulted in varying service interpretations of the tasks.

Furthermore, CENTCOM training requirements are communicated to the services in a document that also outlines training requirements for joint sourced forces.<sup>22</sup> Service officials have expressed confusion over these training requirements and the extent to which they apply to all forces given that the tasks are listed in a document that focuses primarily on unit training requirements for joint sourced forces. Service officials reported that changes to training requirements have also added to the confusion over training requirements and priorities. While the latest set of CENTCOM requirements contained in the joint sourced forces document was issued on May 7, 2009, ground commanders have issued several requirements since then.<sup>23</sup> For example, in January 2010, the Commander, U.S. Forces- Afghanistan, issued an order that contained additional training requirements for all forces deploying to Afghanistan. However, CENTCOM officials said that these Afghanistan-specific requirements had not yet been validated. When CENTCOM validates new requirements it promulgates them in several different ways, including in updates to the training requirements contained in the joint sourced forces document, in individual request for forces, or by CENTCOM messages.

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### The Services Are Providing Training on Most of CENTCOM's Required Tasks, but Have Not Included Certain Tasks

While the Army and Marine Corps have provided most of the CENTCOM required training, in some cases, they have not provided training on the specific tasks called for by CENTCOM. For example, neither service has provided MRAP vehicle rollover training to all of their support forces. MRAP vehicle rollover training has been identified as a key combat skill for deploying forces. MRAP vehicles have much larger profiles and weights than the vehicles they replaced in theater, and as a result, pose a greater risk of tip or rollover when negotiating slopes, trenches, ditches,

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<sup>21</sup>See sections 3013, 5013, and 8013 of Title 10, U.S. Code (2010) for the responsibilities of the service secretaries.

<sup>22</sup>Joint sourced forces consist of units from one service that are deployed to perform their core missions in place of units from another service; for example, Navy or Air Force medical units deployed to fill requirements for Army medical units.

<sup>23</sup>U.S. Central Command FY10 Joint Sourced Training Requirement (May 7, 2009).

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and other obstacles. Further, rollover risks are higher in Afghanistan due to uneven terrain and sub-par road conditions.

A November 2009 DOD study on MRAP vehicle rollovers noted that since 2007, 178 MRAP vehicle mishaps involved some type of rollover that resulted in a total of 215 injuries and 11 fatalities.<sup>24</sup> The study recommended more practice on rollover drills, and CENTCOM has required this training for all deploying forces. According to Marine Corps officials, the Marine Corps is prioritizing MRAP vehicle rollover training, and current Marine Corps guidance requires this training only for marines expected to utilize MRAP vehicles. However, use of these vehicles in theater has been increasing, and officials at I Marine Expeditionary Force explained that they are trying to train deploying forces to meet the MRAP vehicle rollover training requirement. A rollover trainer was originally scheduled to arrive at their training area in February 2010, but the delivery has been delayed and there is currently not a projected delivery date.

Army officials explained that they have attempted to meet the CENTCOM requirement, but that a lack of MRAP rollover trainers at the Army's training bases in the United States has prevented them from fully training all forces on this task prior to deployment. In the meantime, some support forces are getting required training after they deploy, but Army officials were unable to confirm whether all forces were getting the required training.

Moreover, neither the Army nor the Marine Corps have provided non-lethal weapons training to all deploying support forces. CENTCOM requires that all individuals deploying to its area of responsibility complete training in non-lethal weapons usage, planning, and understanding of non-lethal weapons capability sets.<sup>25</sup> DOD reported in December 2009 that operational experience dictates the need for forces to be trained in non-lethal weapons and that current operations have highlighted the imperative for the discriminate use of force to minimize civilian casualties and the integral role that non-lethal weapons capabilities provide in

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<sup>24</sup>Department of Defense, Defense Research and Engineering. "Safety of Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) Vehicles, November 2007-August 2009" (November 2009).

<sup>25</sup>DOD defines non-lethal weapons as weapons that are explicitly designed and primarily employed so as to incapacitate personnel or materiel, while minimizing fatalities, permanent injury to personnel, and undesired damage to property and the environment. Non-lethal weapons include acoustic devices and non-lethal munitions.

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achieving that objective.<sup>26</sup> In that report, DOD noted that non-lethal weapons training has been mandated by CENTCOM for all deploying forces and that non-lethal weapons training must be further integrated into service training. Further, GAO has previously reported that DOD needed to provide clearer weapons employment guidance for non-lethal weapons and incorporate this guidance into training curricula.<sup>27</sup> Due to the confusion over what forces CENTCOM's joint sourced training requirements apply to, Marine Corps officials explained that they do not believe the non-lethal weapons training requirement applies to them and do not require this training. The Army requires non-lethal weapons training only for combat arms units. Army officials explained that they do not have sufficient resources to train all deploying forces, including support forces, on non-lethal weapons, but have not sought formal waivers for this task.

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### Unit Commanders Can Certify Units for Deployment without Successfully Completing All Tasks in Their Final Collective Training Event

According to Joint Publication 1, unit commanders are responsible to their respective Service Chiefs for the training and readiness of their unit.<sup>28</sup> Service guidance emphasizes this responsibility, assigning unit commanders' responsibility for the coordination and completion of predeployment training and validating that servicemembers are certified for deployment.<sup>29</sup> Before forces deploy, Army and Marine Corps guidance requires that units complete a final collective training event.<sup>30</sup> These events can vary based on unit type, assigned mission, and the theater of operations and provide an opportunity for the unit to demonstrate proficiency in collective tasks.

While service guidance requires that units undergo a final collective training event, the guidance does not specifically require that units successfully complete the training before commanders can certify their

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<sup>26</sup>Office of the Undersecretary of Defense, Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, "Department of Defense Report to Congress on Requirements for Non-Lethal Weapons" (December 2009).

<sup>27</sup>GAO, *Defense Management: DOD Needs to Improve Program Management, Policy, and Testing to Enhance Ability to Field Operationally Useful Non-lethal Weapons*, GAO-09-344. (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 21, 2009).

<sup>28</sup>Joint Pub. 1 (May 14, 2007).

<sup>29</sup>AR 350-1 (Dec. 18, 2009) and MARADMIN 740/07 (Dec. 19, 2007).

<sup>30</sup>U.S. Army Forces Command Pre-deployment Training Guidance for Follow-on Forces Deploying In Support Of Southwest Asia (Oct. 27, 2009) and Marine Corps Order 3502.6 (Jan. 26, 2010).

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units for deployment. Army and Marine Corps officials explained that if a support unit does not demonstrate combat skills proficiency during the final event, when and where remediation is to occur is left to the discretion of the individual unit commander and can be completed in theater after deploying. For example, a Marine Corps combat logistics battalion that deployed in January 2010 was assessed fully trained in its logistics mission, but not proficient in basic warrior tasks during its final collective training event at Exercise Mojave Viper.<sup>31</sup> Specifically, the unit was not proficient in fifteen of sixteen warrior tasks including reacting to ambush, escalation of force, individual continuing actions, and casualty evacuation procedures. The Marine Corps logistics training officer who conducts the final unit after action reviews for combat logistics battalions explained that poor ratings on basic warrior skills were not uncommon for support units during their final collective training event. While the unit conducted remedial training on casualty evacuation procedures prior to deployment, it did not conduct remedial training in other areas, since the unit had 15 days to complete both required training that they were unable to accomplish prior to Exercise Mojave Viper and remedial training, and the unit deployed on time. Service officials explained that it is the responsibility of unit commanders to exercise judgment in assessing whether the unit has the collective skills needed to accomplish its mission. However, without visibility over the completion of remediation, Army and Marine Corps support forces may not successfully complete all CENTCOM or service required training tasks prior to deploying.

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## CENTCOM and the Services Lack Complete Information on Servicemembers' Completion of Required Combat Skills Training

The Army and Marine Corps take steps to document the completion of required combat skills training tasks, but face inconsistencies in the way the services track completion of training. While the Army has a service-wide system of record for tracking the completion of training requirements, the system is not being fully utilized. Furthermore, the Marine Corps lacks a service-wide system for tracking the completion of training requirements. Instead, both services rely on paper rosters and stand-alone spreadsheets and databases to track training completion. In addition, even though CENTCOM requires that all forces deploying to its area of responsibility complete a set of required training tasks, the

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<sup>31</sup>Exercise Mojave Viper is the integration of all elements of the Marine Air Ground Task Force into a service-level, pre-deployment training program assessment exercise. It consists of 29 days of evaluated training, with a final collective training event at the end of the curriculum.

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command lacks a clearly defined process for waiving individual training requirements if they cannot be met.

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### Unit Commanders Lack Full Visibility over Completion of Required Training Tasks Due to Inconsistent Service Tracking Systems

According to Joint Publication 1, unit commanders are responsible to their respective Service Chiefs for the training and readiness of their units.<sup>32</sup> Service guidance emphasizes this responsibility, assigning unit commanders' responsibility for coordinating and completing predeployment training and validating that servicemembers are ready for deployment.<sup>33</sup> Higher level decision-makers, including the higher headquarters elements of the units in training, are then responsible for validating the unit commanders' assessments. The Army and Marine Corps take slightly different approaches to validating units for deployment, particularly as it applies to the Army's reserve component. While the Army and Marine Corps active components rely heavily on unit commanders to validate units and higher headquarter elements, such as brigade and division commanders for the Army's active component and the Marine Logistics Groups and Marine Expeditionary Forces for the Marine Corps, to validate the commander's assessment, the Army's reserve component relies heavily on a validation board that convenes at the completion of a unit's training at a mobilization training center. However, according to Army officials, in the end, the final decision is largely based on individual unit commanders' assessments of the readiness of their units.

While the Army issued guidance requiring tracking of training completion through a servicewide system, the system has not been fully utilized. In December 2009, the Army updated a training regulation and required that all individual and collective training tasks be documented for soldiers through the Digital Training Management System (DTMS) in order to better standardize training.<sup>34</sup> Army units were required to report completion of certain requirements, such as suicide prevention classes and the Army physical fitness test tasks, in DTMS prior to the revision of this regulation.<sup>35</sup> However, the revised regulation designates DTMS as the only authorized automated system for managing unit training and requires units

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<sup>32</sup> Joint Pub. 1 (May 14, 2007).

<sup>33</sup> AR 350-1 (Dec. 18, 2009) and MARADMIN 740/07 (Dec. 19, 2007).

<sup>34</sup> AR 350-1 (Dec. 18, 2009).

<sup>35</sup> ALARACT 208/2009. Army Training Records Data Integration/ Digital Training Management System (DTMS) (July 2009).

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to track each individual soldier's completion of all required training tasks, to include all predeployment individual and collective training. The regulation was effective as of January 18, 2010, and states that DTMS will be able to provide units with the ability to plan, resource, and manage unit and individual training. However, as of February 2010, the system was not fully operational, and while active component units were able to enter all of their data into DTMS, reserve component units were not yet able to do so because of a lack of interfaces among existing tracking systems and DTMS. The Army has not yet developed a detailed schedule with milestones and resource requirements for fully developing the capability for reserve component units to input data. Neither has it established milestones for active and reserve component units to enter data into the system. Furthermore, the guidance does not assign responsibility for ensuring compliance and does not make it clear whether previously completed training needs to be entered into the system or only training that is completed after the January 18, 2010, implementation date.

The Army's active and reserve components have both begun using DTMS, but DTMS is not being fully or consistently used by either component. U.S. Army Forces Command officials reported that the capabilities of DTMS are fully operational among the active component, but that units have not consistently used the system. During our discussions with commanders from four active component battalions in February 2010, we found that the system, while operational, was not being fully utilized. We noted that the battalions used DTMS to different degrees. Specifically, two commanders said that their battalions relied on DTMS to track training schedules and some tasks, such as weapons qualification and physical fitness, but they said that their battalions did not track completion of all required tasks down to the individual soldier level. The other two battalion commanders noted that they did not use DTMS to track completion of any training tasks. Overall, none of the four battalions used DTMS the way the Army intended it to be used, but emphasized interest in incorporating the system into how they track training. First Army officials<sup>36</sup> reported that DTMS is not fully operational among the reserve component. Army officials reported that not all of the individual systems the reserve component used to track completion of training were interchangeable with DTMS, and as such, the system was not fully operational. Moreover, in our discussions

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<sup>36</sup>First Army is the command responsible for mobilizing, training, validating, and deploying reserve component units in accordance with Combatant Commander, Department of the Army, and U.S. Army Forces Command directives.

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with unit commanders from five Army Reserve units and one National Guard unit in November 2009, we noted that the system was not being utilized. In fact, none of those commanders were familiar with DTMS despite the fact that the Army had required the entry of suicide prevention classes and the Army physical fitness test tasks into DTMS by September 2009.

Instead of using DTMS, Army support units rely on tools such as paper rosters and stand-alone spreadsheets and databases to track completion of individual and unit training, and the tools used are not consistent among units and commands. For the reserve component, First Army has established an Excel spreadsheet, referred to as the Commander's Training Tool, to track completion of individual training tasks. According to officials, the tool, intended to serve as an "in-lieu-of" system until DTMS reached full operational capability, is used as a model for tracking systems at the individual mobilization training centers. Specifically, officials at one mobilization training center told us that they had developed an individualized tracking system based on the Commander's Training Tool, but had tailored the system to meet the needs of the individual command. Within the active component, unit commanders we spoke with noted that they also rely on tools such as paper rosters and stand-alone spreadsheets and databases to track completion of individual and unit training at the battalion level and below, providing regular status updates to the brigade and division commanders. Reliance on various inconsistent tracking mechanisms instead of the servicewide DTMS limits the visibility unit commanders have over completion of required training tasks.

The Marine Corps also uses inconsistent approaches to track completion of required training and relies instead on paper rosters and stand-alone spreadsheets for tracking. Specifically, 2nd Marine Logistics Group officials said that individual units are responsible for tracking completion of individual training and that this tracking is completed through large Excel spreadsheets, but that the information is regularly reviewed by the Marine Logistics Group. A commander from a support unit within the 2nd Marine Logistics Group noted that training was tracked and reviewed using Excel spreadsheets. Further, the unit's operations officer noted that within the battalion, individual training is tracked at the company level, and once a week, the information is provided to the battalion operations officer, who then briefs the battalion commander on overall percentages of marines who have completed the required tasks.

We also spoke with officials from the 1st Marine Logistics Group who noted that the individual units are responsible for tracking the completion

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of both individual and unit training requirements. While the 1st Marine Logistics Group provides units with a summary level spreadsheet to report the status of the unit training, the individual units are responsible for tracking the completion of individual training and the Marine Logistics Group does not track the completion of individual training. Officials from the 1st Marine Logistics Group noted that unit operations officers have visibility over individuals and their respective training, and this information is rolled up and provided at a high level to the Commanding Officer.

A commander of a support unit we spoke with noted that his unit used the Excel spreadsheet provided by the 1st Marine Logistics Group to track completion of individual training requirements, with individual tracking being done at the company level. Further, sometimes when marines transfer among units, documentation of completed training tasks is not provided to the receiving unit. For example, a support battalion operations officer we spoke with noted that the battalion received many marines throughout the deployment process, but some marines arrived without documentation of the training they had previously completed. In the absence of a consistent approach to track completion of training tasks, the Marine Corps relies on inconsistent tracking mechanisms among individual units and commands. These inconsistent tools limit the visibility unit commanders have over completion of required training tasks, particularly when marines are transferred from one unit to another for deployment purposes.

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### CENTCOM Lacks a Process for Waiving Training Requirements, Limiting the Command's Visibility over Whether Forces Are Completing Required Training

While CENTCOM has issued a consolidated list of minimum theater entry requirements for all individuals deploying to its area of responsibility, it has not issued overarching waiver guidance or established a formal process for waiving each of these requirements (e.g., basic marksmanship and weapons qualification, law of land warfare, and HMMWV and MRAP vehicle egress assistance training) in circumstances where the requirements are not going to be met. However, CENTCOM officials provided an example of a case where waiver requirements for one specific task were outlined. In September 2007, the command issued a message requiring HMMWV egress assistance training for all forces deploying to its area of responsibility.<sup>37</sup> This requirements message included steps the

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<sup>37</sup> Headquarters, U.S. Central Command, HMMWV Egress Assistance Trainer (HEAT) Predeployment Training Requirement (Sep. 14, 2007).

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services needed to take to waive the requirement in the event that the training could not be completed by 100 percent of the deploying personnel before deployment. However, a similar waiver process is not outlined for other required CENTCOM tasks.

Officials from both the Army and Marine Corps noted that there are instances where servicemembers are not completing all of the required training. Specifically, when we spoke to unit commanders and unit training officers, we were told that some personnel were not meeting these individual training requirements and that units were not requesting formal waivers from CENTCOM or communicating this information to CENTCOM. For example, an operations officer from a Marine Corps' combat logistics battalion reported that some of the unit's deploying marines would not complete their required individual training tasks, such as the CENTCOM-required MRAP vehicle egress training.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the commander of an active component Army support battalion noted that in validating his unit for deployment, he did not focus on completion of individual tasks, instead assessing the unit's ability to complete tasks collectively. As such, the unit commander's decision was not based on whether all individuals completed all of the required individual training tasks. There is no clearly defined process for waiving these training requirements, and there is no clear or established method for the services to report to CENTCOM that some servicemembers are not completing CENTCOM's required training. As a result, CENTCOM cannot determine if additional training is required following arrival in theater.

In May 2008, we reported that the Air Force and Navy implemented procedures for waiving CENTCOM-required training without fully coordinating with the CENTCOM headquarters office responsible for developing the training requirements.<sup>39</sup> Specifically, we reported that Navy nonstandard forces that completed Navy combat skills training more than 90 days prior to their deployment would normally have to update their training by repeating the course, but that they could waive this requirement if they completed relevant combat skills training that significantly exceeded what they would have received in the Navy course. We further reported that the Air Force granted waivers for combat skills training on a case-by-case basis. At the time, CENTCOM officials noted that the services had not consistently coordinated these waiver policies

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<sup>38</sup>This operations officer was also designated as the unit's training officer.

<sup>39</sup>GAO-08-670.

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with their command. Therefore, CENTCOM did not have full visibility over the extent to which its assigned forces had met its established training requirements. At the time, we recommended that the Office of the Secretary of Defense develop a policy to guide the training and use of nonstandard forces, and the policy include training waiver responsibilities and procedures. In February 2010, an official from the Office of the Secretary of Defense reported that they planned to issue a revised policy on non-standard forces by the end of the year, and that the revised guidance would address the issue of granting waivers. Furthermore, during our review, we learned that CENTCOM's lack of visibility applies to a larger population of forces than just the Air Force and Navy nonstandard forces, instead applying to all forces deploying to the CENTCOM area of responsibility.

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## **The Army and Marine Corps Have Made Significant Changes to Combat Skills Training as a Result of Lessons Learned, but Information Concerning These Changes Is Not Being Consistently Shared**

The Army and Marine Corps have made significant changes to their combat skills training for support forces as a result of lessons learned, but the services have not uniformly applied lessons learned. Both the Army and Marine Corps require the collection of lessons learned information, and each service relies on formal and informal collection methods to obtain relevant information. While it can take time to incorporate lessons learned into service doctrine, service training facilities are often able to utilize lessons learned to adjust their training almost immediately. However, training facilities do not consistently share information obtained as a result of lessons learned or share changes made to training as a result of lessons learned among other facilities, resulting in servicemembers being trained inconsistently. As such, support forces have been deploying for similar missions with different training.

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## **The Army and Marine Corps Have Incorporated Changes from Lessons Learned into Training and Deployment Preparation**

The Army and Marine Corps collect lessons learned information through both formal and informal processes, and they have made significant changes to their training and deployment preparations as a result of this information. Army and Marine Corps doctrine require the formal collection of lessons learned and designate after action reports as the primary vehicle for this formal collecting of lessons learned information.<sup>40</sup> Trainers and units noted that they prepare after action reports at several

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<sup>40</sup> Army Regulation 11-33 (Oct. 17, 2006) and Marine Corps Order 3504.1 (July 31, 2006).

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different times including after final collective training exercises and during and after deployment. Depending on the complexity of the deficiency that is addressed in an after action report and the resources required to address the deficiency, it can sometimes take considerable time to see actions that result from formal after action reports. However, after action reports have resulted in changes to the way the services train and deploy their forces, as the following examples illustrate.

- In July 2009, the Marine Corps officially established and began training Female Engagement Teams, small detachments of female marines whose goal was to engage Afghan women. The concept of a Female Engagement Team was first introduced in February 2009 as part of a special operations mission in Afghanistan. An after action report emphasizing the need for forces to be organized and trained to engage Afghan women was submitted in response to an incident in May 2009, in which the enemy escaped dressed as women because male Marines were not allowed to engage Afghan women. As a result, the Marine Corps expanded the use of the Female Engagement Team concept, developing an actual program and implementing a training plan. In December 2009, U.S. Forces-Afghanistan released a memorandum that emphasized the need for increased training and use of Female Engagement Teams.<sup>41</sup> Prior to that time, the use of Female Engagement Teams was primarily a Marine Corps effort. However, the memorandum stated that all services should create these teams, and since the memorandum was issued, officials noted that the Army has begun to assess how it can best meet the needs in theater for these teams with its available personnel.
- In November 2009, the 1st Marine Logistics Group established and conducted a new predeployment training course for support forces that focused on combat logistics patrols. The course was developed in response to at least two different units' after action reports, one submitted by a unit returning from Afghanistan and another submitted by a unit undergoing final predeployment training, which highlighted the need for leaders of support units to receive additional training and experience with combat patrols. The redeploying unit's after action report identified shortcomings in how support units conducting convoy missions outside of forward operating bases were trained, and the unit undergoing final training's after action report identified deficiencies in the amount of time spent on training. The new 5-day course—the

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<sup>41</sup>Headquarters, United States Forces-Afghanistan, *Training Improvement Recommendations for US Forces Deploying to Afghanistan* (Dec. 6, 2009).

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Combat Logistics Patrol Leaders Course—focuses on providing support units with the skills they need to conduct combat logistics patrols, which require support forces to leave protected areas where they can become the target for enemies, as opposed to simply convoy missions conducted inside protected forward operating bases.

The services also rely on lessons collected through informal means when adjusting predeployment training. Informal collection methods include obtaining feedback from units currently deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan through informal discussions, observations made by trainers or deploying unit leaders during brief visits to theater, and informal conversations among personnel within service commands and training organizations. Army and Marine Corps officials stated that there is regular communication between personnel who are deployed in theater and the personnel who are preparing to deploy to replace them. Furthermore, they said that the deployed personnel often provide vital information regarding the current conditions in Iraq and Afghanistan, which the deploying unit commander and trainers can use to make immediate adjustments to training. Much like changes made as a result of formal lessons learned, the informal collections have also resulted in changes to the way the services train and deploy their forces, as the following examples illustrate.

- An Army installation established an Individual Replacement Training program to provide individual replacement soldiers with the combat skills needed to join their parent units in theater. Army officials noted that approximately 2 years ago, certain units were tasked to train these individual replacements on a 4- to 5-month rotating basis. However, the units that conducted the training were unable to keep pace with the flow of individual replacements because of their high pace of operations. Based on feedback obtained from the units and observations by unit leadership, Army civilians were assigned responsibility for the training, which resulted in the Individual Replacement Training program. As of 2009, the Individual Replacement Training program trained approximately 3,400 soldiers, and combat skills have been trained more consistently.
- Since improvised explosive devices are commonly used against military forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, training regarding the defeat of these devices is a CENTCOM predeployment training requirement and was cited as a key focus at the training facilities we visited. Officials we spoke with explained that improvised explosive devices pose a serious threat to military forces because the types of devices the enemies use constantly change. While training facilities have incorporated the most recent improvised explosive device defeat tactics into their training based on information provided by the Joint Improvised Explosive

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Device Defeat Organization,<sup>42</sup> they also obtain and immediately incorporate the tactics provided informally by individuals in theater.

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### **The Services Would Benefit from Sharing Changes Made as a Result of Lessons Learned**

Trainers at the sites we visited told us that they had made adjustments to training based on both informal and formal lessons learned information that they had received. However, they also told us that they did not consistently share information about the adjustments they had made with other sites that were training forces on the same tasks, and even in cases where the information was shared, there were still some differences in the training that was being provided to deploying support forces. For example:

- One site significantly enhanced its HMMWV rollover training based on informal feedback. Specifically, the training was enhanced to include hands-on practice in a simulator with both day and night and land and water scenarios, as well as an emphasis on new vehicle features, such as the dual release seatbelts, when exiting the vehicle in an emergency. While trainers from this site provided information about these enhancements to some of their counterparts at other training facilities, HMMWV rollover training varies significantly from site to site. At one of the sites we visited, HMMWV rollover training consisted simply of a short demonstration.
- At one training site we visited, trainers were teaching Army Reserve support forces who had not been mobilized specific tactics for entering and clearing buildings, while other trainers at the same site were teaching soldiers who had been mobilized different tactics for the same task. Officials we spoke with stated that these differences in tactics are a result of a lack of sharing of information among trainers. Specifically, the First Army trainers who were training soldiers after mobilization were not consistently sharing information with U.S. Army Reserve trainers who were training soldiers prior to mobilization. Since one of the primary purposes for conducting repetitive training is to develop an intuitive response to certain circumstances, repetitive training that employs different tactics may not be as effective as repetitive training that uses consistent tactics.

Although officials at the training facilities we visited note that they have made efforts to share some of the information obtained and subsequent changes made as a result of lessons learned with their counterparts at

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<sup>42</sup>The Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization is a jointly manned activity of DOD established to reduce and eliminate the effects of all forms of improvised explosive devices used against U.S. and coalition forces.

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other training facilities, the sharing has been inconsistent. According to a Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction, organizations participating in the joint lessons learned program are to coordinate activities and collaboratively exchange observations, findings, and recommendations to the maximum extent possible.<sup>43</sup> While the services have formal and informal means to facilitate the sharing of lessons learned information, trainers at the various training sites are not consistently sharing information about the changes they have made to their training programs. As a result, servicemembers are trained inconsistently and units that are deploying for similar missions sometimes receive different types and amounts of training.

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## Conclusions

U.S. forces deployed to CENTCOM's area of responsibility, including support forces, are operating in an environment that lacks clear distinctions between the front lines and rear support areas. As a result, support units such as military police, engineers, and medical personnel may be exposed to hostile fire and other battlefield conditions. The Army, Marine Corps, and CENTCOM continue to emphasize the importance of training and have identified specific tasks to be accomplished as part of predeployment training that they believe will better prepare forces to operate in the current operational environment. While forces clearly undergo significant training, clarifying CENTCOM's training requirements, including more clearly defining the specific tasks to be completed by different types of forces and the conditions and standards for the content of training, would enhance the service's ability to ensure that forces are consistently trained on required tasks. Furthermore, in order to make informed decisions on deploying forces and assigning missions once deployed, the services and CENTCOM need information on the extent of training completed by forces prior to deployment. Inconsistencies in existing approaches for documenting the completion of training and the lack of a formal process for granting waivers to training and communicating waiver decisions hamper the services and CENTCOM in their ability to get a clear picture of which units or individuals have been fully trained for certain missions and whether any capability gaps might exist upon the forces' arrival in theater. Last, the services are making significant adjustments in training regimens based on captured lessons learned from actual operational experiences. However, additional efforts

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<sup>43</sup>Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction, CJCSI 3150.25D, Joint Lessons Learned Program (Oct. 10, 2008).

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to share information on these adjustments among and within training facilities would provide greater assurance that the training is consistent.

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## Recommendations

To improve the consistency of training, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense:

- direct the commander, U.S. Central Command to:
  - clarify which of the command's mandatory training requirements apply to all forces deploying to CENTCOM's area of responsibility and which requirements apply only to joint sourced forces, and clearly communicate this information to the services.
  - clearly outline the conditions under which CENTCOM's mandatory training requirements are to be accomplished and the standards to which the tasks should be trained.
- direct the Secretary of the Army and the Commandant of the Marine Corps to:
  - include all of CENTCOM's minimum training requirements in their service training requirements.

To improve commanders' visibility over the extent to which support forces are completing required combat skills training, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Army to fully implement the service's system of record for tracking training completion—the Digital Training Management System by (1) developing a schedule for fully implementing the system, including the work to be performed and the resources to be used, and (2) including the actual start and completion dates of work activities performed so that the impact of deviations on future work can be proactively addressed. We further recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct the Commandant of the Marine Corps to establish and fully implement consistent approaches for documenting the completion or waiving of combat skills training requirements. We are also broadening our prior recommendation on waiver oversight and recommending that the Secretary of Defense direct the commander, U.S. Central Command, to establish a formal process for waiving training requirements for all deploying forces, not just nonstandard forces, and to communicate this process to the services.

To maintain training consistency as training evolves in response to ongoing operations, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Army and the Commandant of the Marine Corps to develop a method for consistently sharing information concerning changes that are made to training programs in response to formal or informal lessons learned.

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## Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

In written comments on a draft of this report, DOD concurred or partially concurred with our recommendations. Specifically, DOD concurred with our six recommendations related to the definition, completion, and waiver of training requirements, and sharing information on changes to training based on lessons learned. DOD stated that it has inserted draft language into its 2010 update to the “Guidance for the Development of the Force” and its draft DOD Instruction 1322.mm entitled “Implementing DOD Training” to address our recommendations.

DOD partially concurred with our recommendation that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Army to fully implement the Digital Training Management System (DTMS)—the service’s system of record for tracking training completion—by (1) developing a schedule for fully implementing the system, including the work to be performed and the resources to be used, and (2) including the actual start and completion dates of work activities performed so that the impact of deviations on future work can be proactively addressed. In its comments, DOD stated that the Army’s training management system of record has been directed to be implemented and that in order to fully leverage this capability, it will take time, training and resources to extend the system to the entire organization. Instead of stipulating DTMS, DOD requested that GAO address (in our recommendation) more generally the Army’s training management system of record. We recognize that it will take time for the Army to fully implement the system, but also note that it has not set a specific schedule, with key elements, such as work to be performed, resources needed, and milestones for start and completion of activities, which we believe will add discipline to the process, help guide its efforts, and help the Army to plan for any schedule deviations. We recognize that the Army continues to refine DTMS and that changes could occur. However, at this point in time, Army guidance specifically characterizes DTMS as the Army’s training management system of record; therefore, we do not agree that our recommendation should be adjusted.

Furthermore, DOD stated that some findings in the draft report are partially accurate, but that a number of points of information and clarification related to DTMS provided by the Department of the Army do not appear in the findings. For example, DOD noted that ongoing efforts by the Army designed to improve DTMS will expand existing functionality and interfaces to enhance and broaden operational use of the application by Army units. It noted the Army has a review process that, among other things, monitors progress of DTMS implementation and allows for the establishment and approval of priorities for developing interfaces with other existing legacy systems and manual processes. In addition, DOD

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stated that the report cites that DTMS is not fully operational because all interfaces are not completed to the satisfaction of a subordinate organization, which, in DOD's view, does not drive the level of program functionality or define the point in time when the system is fully operational. DOD noted that the inclusion of updated interfaces enables data input from other sources and that the basic functionality of DTMS is in place, operational, and available for use by units across the Army. DOD also noted some Army units are still using spreadsheets and/ or legacy systems to track individual training rather than DTMS, but that this is a function of compliance, not operational capability or the availability of system interfaces. It further stated that the Army is currently working to institute methods to improve compliance as outlined in AR 350-1, the Army's regulation that guides training.<sup>44</sup>

We recognize that the basic functionality of DTMS exists and that the Army is continuing to take steps to implement DTMS, improve the interfaces between DTMS and legacy systems and processes, and improve overall compliance with the requirement for units to report in DTMS. However, our work suggests that it is not only a lack of compliance preventing full utilization of the system, but also a lack of awareness among all of the operational units that DTMS even exists. For example, within the reserve component, some unit commanders we interviewed were unfamiliar with DTMS or that they were required, by Army guidance, to use the system to report training completion. Further, while we recognize interfaces exist, our work shows they are not fully mature to the point where they are compatible with existing tracking systems, thereby limiting the ability of the reserve component to fully use DTMS as intended.

DOD further noted that the report infers that DTMS could or should be the source for CENTCOM and the Army to certify and/ or validate unit training for deployments, but due to it not being fully utilized, the completion of combat skills training could be in question. DOD explained that DTMS is a training management system, and it is the responsibility of Commanders and Army Service Component Commands to certify and validate units. As stated in our report, we recognize that commanders and the service component commands are responsible for the certification and validation of units for deployment. However, in order to be more fully informed about the training and readiness status of units before making decisions

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<sup>44</sup> A.R. 350-1 (Dec. 18, 2009).

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about deployments, those making these decisions need visibility over the completion of the combatant command and service pre-deployment training requirements. Currently, DTMS does not provide unit commanders or service component commands with this type of visibility, and therefore, these individuals and commands must rely on the tracking mechanisms we outlined in this report when certifying and validating units, and these tracking mechanisms are not always complete or consistent. The full text of DOD's written comments is reprinted in appendix II.

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We are sending copies of this report to the Secretary of Defense. In addition, this report will be available at no charge on the GAO Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>.

Should you or your staff have any questions concerning this report, please contact me at (202) 512-9619 or [pickups@gao.gov](mailto:pickups@gao.gov). Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. Key contributors to this report are listed in appendix III.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sharon L. Pickup". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Sharon" and "L." on the first line and "Pickup" on the second line.

Sharon L. Pickup, Director  
Defense Capabilities and Management

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*List of Congressional Committees*

The Honorable Carl Levin  
Chairman  
The Honorable John McCain  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Armed Services  
United States Senate

The Honorable Daniel Inouye  
Chairman  
The Honorable Thad Cochran  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Defense  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate

The Honorable Ike Skelton  
Chairman  
The Honorable Howard McKeon  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Armed Services  
House of Representatives

The Honorable Norman D. Dicks  
Chairman  
The Honorable C.W. Bill Young  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Defense  
Committee on Appropriations  
House of Representatives

# Appendix I: Scope and Methodology

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To assess the extent to which Army and Marine Corps support forces are completing required combat skills training, we reviewed combatant commander and service individual and unit predeployment training requirements, including CENTCOM's Theater Entry Requirements, the U.S. Army Forces Command's Predeployment Training Guidance for Follow-on Forces Deploying In Support of Southwest Asia, and Marine Corps Order 3502.6, Marine Corps Force Generation Process. To determine if the services were fully addressing the CENTCOM minimum requirements, we compared the CENTCOM minimum training requirements to the Army and Marine Corps minimum requirements, making linkages where possible and obtaining service explanations when linkages did not appear to exist. We also reviewed policy documents on service training, such as the services' common skills manuals and training programs of instruction. Additionally, we interviewed and analyzed information from officials responsible for developing and implementing training requirements at CENTCOM, Department of the Army Training Directorate, U.S. Army Forces Command, First Army, U.S. Army National Guard, U.S. Army Reserve Command, Marine Corps Training and Education Command, and Marine Forces Command. Lastly, we observed support force training at four of the Army and Marine Corps' largest training facilities—Fort Dix, Camp Lejeune, Camp Pendleton, and Twentynine Palms Marine Corps Base. At the training sites, we interviewed and collected various training-related documents from Army and Marine Corps active and reserve component units participating in predeployment training as well as training command officials on the implementation of service training guidance. We also obtained information from Army active component support forces stationed at Fort Hood.

To assess the extent to which the services and Central Command have information to validate the completion of required combat skills training, we reviewed Army and Marine Corps policies on training, including Army Regulation 350-1, which outlines requirements for servicewide tracking through the Digital Training Management System, and Marine Corps Order 3502.6, Marine Corps Force Generation Process. We also coordinated with the U.S. Army Audit Agency regarding their ongoing efforts in reviewing the Digital Training Management System. We interviewed service headquarters officials to discuss the processes the services use to track completion of training requirements. We reviewed Joint Publication 1, and other joint and service policies that document the role and responsibilities of unit commanders in tracking and reporting completion of training requirements. We interviewed Department of the Army Training Directorate, Marine Corps Training and Education Command, U.S. Army Forces Command, Marine Forces Command, First Army, and U.S. Army

Reserve Command officials and reviewed documents from these commands, which are involved in the process of tracking the completion of combat skills training. Additionally, we interviewed an Army training command and the 1st, 2nd, and 4th Marine Corps Logistics Groups to discuss the processes used to track completion of training requirements at the unit level. We reviewed the means these organizations use to document the extent to which servicemembers were completing required training—paper records, automated spreadsheets, and databases. We further interviewed thirteen unit commanders of units preparing to deploy or returning from deployment to identify individual processes being used to track completion of training requirements. Lastly, we interviewed and obtained information from officials representing CENTCOM, Army and Marine Corps headquarters, and the Army and Marine Corps force providers and training commands to discuss the processes the services use to waive service and combatant command training requirements. We also reviewed past related GAO reports regarding the tracking and waiving of training requirements.

To assess the extent to which the Army and Marine Corps have applied lessons learned from operational experiences to adjust combat skills training for support forces, we reviewed service policies on the collection and dissemination of lessons learned, specifically Army Regulation 11-33 for the Army Lessons Learned Program and Marine Corps Order 3504.1 for the Marine Corps Lessons Learned Program and the Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned. These policies, which establish the services' lessons learned centers, also require the collection of after action reports. Further, we reviewed joint guidance to determine whether requirements existed for the training facilities and services to collaborate and share lessons learned information. We interviewed and obtained information on the collection and implementation of lessons learned from officials representing the Center for Army Lessons Learned and the Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned. We also interviewed lessons learned liaisons, training command officials, trainers, and officials responsible for developing unit training plans at five of the Army and Marine Corps' largest training sites—Fort Hood, Fort Dix, Camp Lejeune, Camp Pendleton, and Twentynine Palms. While interviewing officials from the lessons learned centers and the training facilities, discussions included: the use of various lessons learned to alter and improve predeployment training; the types of products the centers create and distribute; and the extent to which trainers shared the information among training sites. Based on these discussions with lessons learned officials, we identified and reviewed a nongeneralizable sample of the formal lessons learned reports and handbooks that applied

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specifically to training for support forces. We also reviewed past related GAO and DOD reports regarding lessons learned.

To gain insight on support forces' perspectives on completion of combatant command and service combat skills training requirements, we conducted discussions with five Army Reserve and one Army National Guard support units—military intelligence, movement control, combat camera, medical, and human resources—located at the combined pre- and post-mobilization training center Fort Dix, New Jersey, and three active component Marine Corps combat logistics battalions from the two Marine Corps Divisions located in the continental United States that were preparing to deploy to either Iraq or Afghanistan, as well as four of Fort Hood's active component Army support battalions that have recently returned from deployment. To conduct these discussion sessions, we traveled to one Army installation and three Marine Corps installations in the continental United States from August 2009 through December 2009 and conducted telephone discussions with representatives from one active duty Army installation in February 2010. In selecting units to speak with, we asked the service headquarters and force providers to identify all support units that would be in pre-mobilization or predeployment training during the time frame of our visit. The basic criteria used in selecting these units was that they were an Army or Marine Corps support unit participating in pre-mobilization or predeployment training and preparing to deploy to or recently redeployed from either Iraq or Afghanistan. Thus, our selection was limited since the time frame was so narrow. Once units were identified, we spoke with the unit command elements and senior enlisted servicemembers from nine support units that were available at the individual sites we visited. Overall, we spoke with Army and Marine Corps support units preparing to deploy to Iraq and Afghanistan, and within these units, some servicemembers who had previously deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan. We also spoke with four available active component Army support unit representatives who had recently returned from Iraq. Topics of discussion during the sessions included development and implementation of unit training plans, verification of training completion, and equipment and manning challenges that impact training. We also administered a short questionnaire to participants in the senior enlisted discussion sessions to obtain their feedback on the combat skills training their unit received. Comments provided during the discussion groups, as well as on the questionnaire, cannot be projected across the entire military community because the participants were not selected using a generalizable probability sampling methodology. To validate information we heard in the discussion groups, we interviewed the unit's higher

headquarters, where available, as well as officials from the training commands and service headquarters and force providers.

Table 1 outlines all of the organizations we interviewed during the course of our review.

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**Table 1: Organizations Interviewed During Our Review**

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Office of the Undersecretary of Defense (Personnel & Readiness), Arlington, Va.
U.S Army
Department of the Army, Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans (G-3), Arlington, Va.
Combined Arms Center, Fort Leavenworth, Kan.
Combined Arms Support Command, Fort Lee, Va.
U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, Fort Monroe, Va.
U.S. Army Forces Command, Fort McPherson, Ga.
U.S. Army Audit Agency, Alexandria, Va.
First Army, Fort Gillem, Ga.
U.S. Army Reserve Command, Fort McPherson, Ga.
Army National Guard, Arlington, Va.
Center for Army Lessons Learned, Fort Leavenworth, Kan.
Fort Dix, N.J.
72nd Field Artillery Brigade
Regional Training Center-East
New Jersey National Guard
Center for Army Lessons Learned Representatives
Select Support Units
Fort Hood, Tex.
Individual Replacement Training Team
Centers for Army Lessons Learned Representatives
Select Support Units
U.S. Marine Corps
Headquarters Marine Corps, Arlington, Va.
Marine Corps Training and Education Command, Quantico, Va.
Marine Forces Command, Norfolk, Va.
Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned, Quantico, Va.
Marine Corps Air Ground Task Force Training Command and Tactical Training Exercise Control Group, Twentynine Palms, Calif.
I Marine Expeditionary Force, Camp Pendleton, Calif.

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II Marine Expeditionary Force, Camp Lejeune, N.C.
1st Marine Logistics Group, Camp Pendleton, Calif.
2nd Marine Logistics Group, Camp Lejeune, N.C.
4th Marine Logistics Group, New Orleans, La.
U.S. Central Command, MacDill Air Force Base, Fl.

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Source: GAO.

We conducted this performance audit from August 2009 through February 2010, in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

# Appendix II: Comments from the Department of Defense

  
PERSONNEL AND READINESS

UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

MAR 24 2010

Ms. Sharon L. Pickup  
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Pickup:

This is the Department of Defense Response to the Government Accountability Office Draft report titled: Actions Needed To Further Improve the Consistency of Combat Skills Training Provided for Army and Marine Corps Support Forces (GAO 10-465.) We thank you for the opportunity to comment. Regarding the recommendations, we concur with items 1, 2, 3, 6, 7 and 8. We partially concur with items 4 and 5. Elaboration on these positions is in the enclosure appended to this letter.

Sincerely,

  
Samuel D. Kleinman  
Deputy Under Secretary of Defense  
Readiness



ENCLOSURE

GAO DRAFT REPORT DATED MARCH 1, 2010  
GAO-10-465 (GAO CODE 351385)

“MILITARY TRAINING: ACTIONS NEEDED TO FURTHER IMPROVE  
THE CONSISTENCY OF COMBAT SKILLS TRAINING PROVIDED TO  
ARMY AND MARINE CORPS SUPPORT FORCES”

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS  
TO THE GAO RECOMMENDATIONS

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Commander, U.S. Central Command to clarify which of the command's mandatory training requirements apply to all forces deploying to U.S. Central Command's (CENTCOM's) area of responsibility and which requirements apply only to joint sourced forces, and clearly communicate this information to the services. (See page 28/GAO Draft Report.)

**DoD RESPONSE: Concur.** Delineating training requirements between joint sourced forces and all forces deploying to CENTCOM will streamline minimum theatre training requirements for sourced personnel. Draft language to that effect has been inserted into 2010 update to 'Guidance for the Development of the Force.' In addition, similar language specifying CCDRs clarify and update their requirements is added to the draft DoDI 1322.mm, *Implementing DoD Training*. Stipulated training requirements should be vetted through the Joint Staff with collaboration from CENTCOM and the Services for final disposition.  
**Recommend item be closed.**

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Commander, U.S. Central Command to clearly outline the conditions under which CENTCOM's mandatory training requirements are to be accomplished and the standards to which the tasks should be trained. (See page 28/GAO Draft Report.)

**DoD RESPONSE: Concur.** Draft language to that effect has been inserted into 2010 update to 'Guidance for the Development of the Force.' Draft language to that effect has been inserted to the draft DoDI 1322.mm, *Implementing DoD Training*. Stipulated training requirements should be vetted through the Joint Staff with collaboration from CENTCOM and the Services for final disposition.  
**Recommend item be closed.**

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Army and the Commandant of the Marine Corps to include all of CENTCOM's minimum training requirements in their training requirements. (See page 28/GAO Draft Report.)

**DoD RESPONSE: Concur.** Draft language to that effect has been inserted into 2010 update to 'Guidance for the Development of the Force.' Draft language to that effect has been inserted into the draft DoDI 1322.mm, *Implementing DoD Training* Stipulated training requirements should be vetted through the Joint Staff with collaboration from CENTCOM and the Services for final disposition.

**Recommend item be closed.**

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Army to fully implement the service's system of record for tracking training completion-the Digital Training Management System by developing a schedule for fully implementing the system, including the work to be performed and the resources to be used. (See pages 28 & 29/GAO Draft Report.)

**DoD RESPONSE: Partially concur.** Army's training management system of record has been directed to be implemented. In order to fully leverage this capability, it will take time, training and resources to extend the system to the entire organization. Instead of stipulating Digital Training Management System specifically, DoD requests that GAO address, more generally, the Army's training management system of record. The Army states that the report narrative and recommendations #4 & #5 are not supportive of each other. The recommendations currently state that the Secretary of Defense needs to direct the Secretary of the Army to fully implement the Digital Training Management System (DTMS) by developing a schedule to fully implement the system, including the work to be performed and the resources to be used, and identifying the actual start and completion dates of work activities performed so that the impact of deviations on future work can be addressed.

(1) Some of the findings in the draft report are partially accurate; however, a number of Digital Training Management System points of information / clarification provided by the Department of the Army to the audit team do not appear in the findings. Army requests these points be integrated into the final report.

(2) Ongoing efforts by the Army designed to improve DTMS will expand existing functionality and interfaces to enhance and broaden operational use of the application by Army units IAW AR 350-1. The Army conducts a semi-annual DTMS Requirements Control Board (RCB) governed by the G-3/5/7 Training

General Officer Steering Committee (TGOSC). This review process will continue to monitor the progress of DTMS implementation throughout the Army. This process allows the RCB and TGOSC to establish and approve priorities for developing interfaces with other existing legacy systems and manual processes. Additionally, this process supports the addition of functional modules to DTMS that better support the training information desires of individual commands. DTMS developments and improvements do compete for resources and operate within that constraint. DTMS is an Army developed Training Management System designed to support unit level training management, individual training records and managing unit level training. The application is, however, limited to the capabilities defined in support of Army Training Management and may not meet every need or desire across the spectrum of units within the Army.

(3) Some Army units (not limited to support units) are still using spreadsheets and/or legacy systems to track individual training rather than using DTMS as a function of compliance, not operational capability or the availability of system interfaces. The Army is currently working to institute methods to improve compliance IAW AR 350-1.

(4) The report cites that DTMS is not fully operational because all interfaces are not completed to the satisfaction of a subordinate organization. This does not drive the level of program functionality or define the point in time when it is fully operational. The inclusion of updated interfaces enables data input from other sources. The basic functionality of the application is in place, operational, and is available for use by units across the Army.

(5) The report infers that DTMS could or should be the source for CENTCOM and the Army to certify / validate unit training for deployments, but due to it not being fully utilized, the completion of combat skills training could be in question. DTMS is a training management system; Commanders and Army Service Component Commands certify / validate units.

**Recommend item be closed.**

**RECOMMENDATION 5:** The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Army to fully implement the service's system of record for tracking training completion—the Digital Training Management system by including the actual start and completion dates of work activities performed so that the impact of deviations on future work can be proactively addressed. (See page 29/GAO Draft Report.)

**DoD RESPONSE: Partially concur.** See notes in response to recommendation 4. **Recommend item be closed.**

**RECOMMENDATION 6:** The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Commandant of the Marine Corps to establish and fully implement consistent approaches for documenting the completion or waiving of combat skills training requirements. (See page 29/GAO Draft Report.)

**DoD RESPONSE: Concur.** Draft language to that effect has been inserted into 2010 update to 'Guidance for the Development of the Force.' Draft language to that effect has been inserted into the draft DoDI 1322.mm, *Implementing DoD Training*. Stipulated training requirements should be vetted through the Joint Staff with collaboration from CENTCOM and the Services for final disposition.  
**Recommend item be closed.**

**RECOMMENDATION 7:** The GAO is broadening their prior recommendation on waiver oversight and recommending that the Secretary of Defense direct the Commander, U.S. Central Command, to establish a formal process for waiving training requirements for all deploying forces, not just nonstandard forces, and to communicate this process to the services. (See page 29/GAO Draft Report.)

**DoD RESPONSE: Concur.** Draft language to that effect has been inserted into 2010 update to 'Guidance for the Development of the Force.' Draft language to that effect has been inserted into the draft DoDI 1322.mm, *Implementing DoD Training*. Stipulated training requirements should be vetted through the Joint Staff with collaboration from CENTCOM and the Services for final disposition.  
**Recommend item be closed.**

**RECOMMENDATION 8:** The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Army and the Commandant of the Marine Corps to develop a method for consistently sharing information concerning changes that are made to training programs in response to formal or informal lessons learned. (See page 29/GAO Draft Report.)

**DoD RESPONSE: Concur.** Draft language to that effect has been inserted into 2010 update to 'Guidance for the Development of the Force.' Draft language to that effect has been inserted into the draft DoDI 1322.mm, *Implementing DoD Training*. DoD plans to review and improve, where appropriate, the dissemination of changes to training programs resulting from the analysis of lessons learned. **Recommend item be closed.**

# Appendix III: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

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## GAO Contact

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Sharon L. Pickup, (202) 512-9619 or [pickups@gao.gov](mailto:pickups@gao.gov).

## Acknowledgments

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In addition to the contact named above, key contributors to this report were Michael Ferren (Assistant Director), Susan Ditto, Lonnie McAllister, Terry Richardson, Michael Silver, Christopher Watson, Natasha Wilder, Erik Wilkins-McKee, and Kristy Williams.

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